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MUSIC AND MASONRY

THE PRESTONIAN LECTURE FOR 1988

BY BRO. ANDREW PEARMAIN

Music produces a kind of pleasure which
human nature cannot do without

Confucius

OVERTURE¹

AS IN THE ARTS OF LITERATURE, poetry, painting and sculpture, where language, colour and line are the media in which there is communication with the reader and spectator, so music too is another means of reaching out to the listener, and by its varying moods and harmonies people can express or release their emotions and from it derive much enjoyment.

The presence of music in our lives has been evident from the beginning of time. Little imagination is needed to realize that in primitive man there must have been desires and yearnings which he could not understand, still less put into words however much he may have tried. Mere speech was not enough, he needed something more forceful – an outlet for these strange emotions – and he ultimately found it in a rudimentary form of song. It may seem extravagant to say that, through this elementary art, the first conceptions of a force outside the human body were aroused in the human mind. Yet, when primitive man felt that, through music, his supplications were heard, he naturally came to conceive of a Being higher than himself – a Being who could watch over him with parental care. In these early incantations or chanting during primitive ceremonies, the voice of a Supreme Being himself was personified through the priests' or magicians' intoning, therefore providing the only direct communications with the spirits around.

People began to use music at this time to express their feelings and emotions in a positive way and this must be equally relevant today when music is a universally accepted vehicle for groups of people to express simultaneously their common emotions.

It would have been these same priests who, by degrees, improved the primitive type of song and transformed it into a species of chanted spell. One such effect was to increase emotional fervour, with the result that men began to move their bodies by dancing and clapping their hands. In the course of time the most elementary form of drum was invented to accentuate the rhythm. This led to the development of other instruments and so to the actual birth of music as an art.

Music through the ages has been used to enrich and adorn rites and ceremonies and it is in this context that I approach my subject. Dr. Johnson referred to music as 'the costliest of rackets' and Thomas Carlyle saw it as 'a kind of inarticulate, unfathomable speech which leads us to the edge of the infinite'. Two such diverse comments on the same subject typify the differing effect music has on any group of people, not least on masonic gatherings. Some will nod intelligently at the dissonances; the peculiar 'squeaks and groans' produced by modern composers trying to express themselves through new idioms in the art! A greater number will listen with pleasure, even if lacking in musical knowledge, to the more familiar sounds of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven and enjoy the more 'singable' tunes of Lehar and Andrew Lloyd Webber. But, to very many, music is nothing but an ear-splitting, wall-shaking, head-throbbing endurance test – each of us has his own very individual taste.

So, in the light of this last statement, why do we have music in masonic ceremonies? I suggest three immediate reasons. Firstly, are we not 'bidden to study such of the liberal arts and sciences as lie within the compass of our attainments'? Secondly, would not many of our masonic thoughts and ideas, if clothed in harmony and concord, perhaps take on a more appealing dimension and so make more impact in the minds of those

brethren taking part in a ceremony? And the third reason for its inclusion is that its presence is able to elevate and direct our thoughts on to a receptive level so that the meaning and interpretation of the ritual is more easily filtered into our consciousness.

INTERMEZZO

In the short space of time allotted to a Prestonian Lecturer it would be impossible for me to recite the names of all masonic composers and their music. The precepts and tenets of the Craft have inspired at least half-a-dozen operas, several hundred songs and cantatas, as well as innumerable instrumental pieces.

Selections of masonic songs, either published separately or bound up with other publications, were very common in the eighteenth century. One might almost say that our brethren in those days continually had 'a song in their hearts'! Anderson's *Book of Constitutions* of 1723, and even so-called 'exposures' of masonic secrets such as *Jachin and Boaz* of 1762, contained sections of 'Songs sung at the best Lodges'. It is not difficult to imagine the convivial atmosphere at meetings where the ritual and the festive board were inseparable. One of the earliest masonic songs was 'The Enter'd Apprentice's Song' written by Matthew Birkhead of the Drury Lane Theatre (and a member of the Lodge of Friendship) to a tune which first appeared in 1717.² A song from Bro. George Bickham's *Musical Entertainer* of 1738 contains this verse:

Then, landlord, bring a hogshead,
And in the corner place it;
Till it resound
With hollow sound,
Each Mason here will face it.

William Rufus Chetwode also worked at Drury Lane and subsequently at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin. In August 1730 his opera, *The Generous Freemason*, was performed at the Bartholomew Fair in Smithfield, City of London. This 'tragi-comi-farcical' ballad opera was dedicated to 'The Right Worshipful the Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master, Grand Wardens and the rest of the Brethren of the 'Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons'. The play closes with the song:

By Masons' Art the aspiring Dome
In various columns shall arise;
All climates are their native home,
Their God-like actions reach the skies.
Heroes and Kings revere their name,
And poets sing their lasting fame.

In 1775 a new Freemasons' Hall was built in Great Queen Street, London, and at its Dedication on 23 May 1776 an Ode, written for the occasion by Bro. John Fisher of Alfred Lodge, Oxford, and the Royal Somerset and Inverness Lodge, was performed by a choir and orchestra of trumpets, oboes, flutes, horns, bassoons and strings with organ continuo. Fisher, born in Dunstable in 1744, was a member of the King's Band in 1763 and leader of the Covent Garden Orchestra in 1769.³ Although an organ was acquired for the Hall, accommodation was also provided for an orchestra. In the eighteenth century, music for lodges was generally played on instruments such as violins, flutes, oboes, etc, rather in the style of the 'church bands' of the period and it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that the reed organ and harmonium found their place in the lodge room. Although many lodges now use electronic instruments, there are still interesting examples of pipe organs in use in some of our older temples up and down the country.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is, of course, the most famous masonic composer. Much has been written about his music and his Freemasonry. He composed a number of pieces for masonic occasions, including cantatas, songs, opening and closing odes and

instrumental music for ritual use. Mozart was initiated in the Lodge of Benevolence in Vienna in 1784 when he was 28. In 1785, he composed one of his greatest works, the Masonic Funeral Music, to commemorate the deaths of two distinguished Freemasons, Duke Georg August of Mecklenburg and Prince Franz Esterhazy. 'He has written nothing to surpass this short funeral adagio', said his biographer, Jahn, 'for the beauty of its technical treatment and the perfection of sound, or its depth of feeling and of psychological truth'.^{4,5}

Perhaps the most celebrated work attributed to masonic influence is his opera *The Magic Flute*.

Its ideological connection with Freemasonry has been referred to by many writers and certainly merits the description, 'veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'.⁶

Franz Joseph Haydn, a fellow Austrian, was a contemporary and friend of Mozart and was introduced by him to Freemasonry.⁷ His oratorio *The Creation* contains passages which are surely influenced by the masonic themes of light and enlightenment – the change from chaos to order and darkness to light. Although there is no definite record of Ludwig van Beethoven's becoming a member of the Craft, there are very strong grounds for believing that he was a mason. Many of his friends and fellow musicians were masons and there are several references to Masonry in his voluminous correspondence. The Adagio of his Seventh quartet bears the superscription: 'A weeping willow or an acacia over the grave of my brother'. Both Beethovens's blood brothers were alive when this work was written and so these words probably had a masonic connection. Schindler, one of his biographers, mentions a handshake when visiting the composer: '... a grip of our hands said the rest'. A song, 'What is the Mason's aim', was written for the *Loge des Frères Courageux à l'Orient de Bonn* and published in 1806.⁸

The Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius, was 56 when he was initiated, passed and raised on the one day, 18 August 1922 in Suomi Lodge No. 1 in Helsinki, and in 1924, when the Grand Lodge of Finland was established, Sibelius, with several leading opera and choral singers, provided the music for the occasion. Sibelius is regarded as one of the great 'nationalist' composers, finding in his native land the inspiration for most of his work. In 1926 he was asked to compose special music for his lodge and a year later wrote a series of nine pieces for lodge use. As the music was in manuscript form, it was some time before it was heard outside Finland, but in 1935 a copy was presented to the Grand Lodge of New York which had sponsored the establishment of the Finnish Grand Lodge.⁹ In 1950 the composer added three more pieces to the original nine.¹⁰

Apart from that of Sibelius, very little music has been written in modern times for the Craft. A few anthems and other vocal pieces have been composed for consecrations and other special occasions but we seem to have lost the motivation to use the art of music in Masonry. Perhaps we could revive it!

When the office of Grand Organist was instituted in 1813 by the Grand Master, the Duke of Sussex, the first holder was Samuel Wesley, one of the foremost musicians of his day. Other well-known English masonic musicians include William Boyce and Thomas Attwood, the latter a pupil of Mozart and both noted as composers of cathedral music, Thomas Arne, the composer of 'Rule, Britannia', Sterndale Bennett, Walter Parratt and Arthur Sullivan, of Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

Several lodges have been formed with musical connections. My mother-lodge, The Cathedral Lodge, was founded by Vicars Choral of St Paul's Cathedral, and others, including St Cecilia, Sterndale Bennett, Orchestral and Angelus, have singers and players amongst their members.

FINALE

'A Lodge meeting without music is dead'. How many times have I heard that statement made by Secretaries and other officers after vainly seeking an organist to provide the music which would have given their meeting that extra dimension which I mentioned at the beginning of my lecture. We have heard some of the music that has been used in the

past and I put forward the idea that the omission of music in our ritual is not only a deprivation for brethren taking part, but is also a questionable gap in our cultural heritage – rather like ignoring Shakespeare, Milton or Keats in our English language. This is obviously a debatable point and, if discussed, would, I am sure, stir up fierce arguments for and against it, but I feel it my duty to make the Craft aware of the splendid music that has enriched masonic meetings over the years, so that its existence is at least recognized, noted and hopefully used again in the future.

Obviously the choice and use of both vocal and instrumental music would have to be regulated carefully to prevent its misuse. The English Grand Lodge has forbidden vocal music during the ritual, lest any texts or verses are introduced which could be contrary to masonic ideals and precepts, although a few lodges have had a special dispensation to introduce odes and anthems in their ceremonies. Other Grand Lodges, Norway, for instance, allow music to be sung during perambulations and I would like to think that more brethren here could be persuaded to act as lodge Organists if they were asked to provide more than just background music. On this point, I must strongly deplore the use of 'Music hall' tunes for the investiture of lodge officers. My particular aversion is 'Buddy, can you spare a dime' for the Almoner or Charity Steward. However, the Craft should be grateful to all those musicians who struggle, sometimes with antiquated or ineffective organs and often with little thanks or appreciation, to provide the music which is often taken for granted.¹¹

CODA

I hope this lecture will have evoked some interest in the musical element of Freemasonry, that it will have been reasonably informative and, at the same time, will have provided some entertainment.¹²

Bro. Pearmain arranged and directed relevant music, recorded on cassette tape and made available at the deliveries of his Prestonian Lecture.* Many of the pieces from the cassette were used to illustrate the lecture and these are indicated by numbered references in the text which has been reproduced in the preceding pages. Those references are related to the list here given of the contents of the entire recording.

John Fisher: Ode for the New Freemasons' Hall (1776) for tenor and bass soloists, chorus and orchestra

Overture¹

Recitative 'Twas then the shouting sons of joy

Chorus The mighty Master's pencil warm¹²

Aria Heav'n and earth were seen to join³

Recitative Ye spirits pure

Chorus Again with quick instinctive fire

Recitative Yet, ere the holy rites began

Aria How within the wasted heart

Chorus What pain he shuns who dares to be wise

for tenor and bass soloists, chorus and orchestra

Matthew Birkhead: Entered Apprentice's Song²

Mozart: *Gesellenreise* (Fellowcraft's Journey)⁶ – to words by Bro. J. F. Ratschky

Haydn: Adieu, the sun is set⁷ – to words by Bro. Robert Burns

Beethoven: *Maurerfragen*⁸ – to words by Bro. F. G. Wegeler

Sibelius: Ode to Fraternity⁹ – to words by Bro. Samuli Sario

Finlandia¹⁰

Charles Godfrey, Bandmaster, Royal Horse Guards (late 19th C.): Grand Lodge Waltz (for orchestra)¹¹

Opening of the Lodge

The Initiation
 The Deacons
 The Wardens
 The Worshipful Master

The four soloists, the six male members of the chorus and the orchestra of eighteen players, were all freemasons. Seven ladies provided the soprano and contralto voices in the choir.

Additional illustrations were taken from a recording of Mozart's *Music for Masonic Occasions* (commercially available):

Masonic Funeral Music⁴
 Adagio in B flat⁵

* Copies of Bro. Andrew Pearmain's cassette recording can be obtained from Q.C.C.C. Limited, at a cost of £5.50 inclusive of postage. Its sale will benefit the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution and the Musicians' Benevolent Fund.

THE BOOK OF CONSTITUTIONS OF THE UNITED GRAND LODGE OF ENGLAND 1815-1988

THE PRESTONIAN LECTURE FOR 1989

BY RW BRO. SIR LIONEL BRETT

INTRODUCTORY

At his initiation every brother is presented with a copy of the Book of Constitutions (though this was not obligatory until 1940) and is told that it will teach him the duties he owes to the Craft in general. A newly-installed Master of a lodge is again presented with a copy (not always an up-to-date one) and told that scarce any case of difficulty can arise within the lodge in which the book will not set him right. Both statements have to be accepted with some reserve. In his early days the ordinary freemason will learn more of his duties from the practices and precepts of his brethren than from a study of the Book of Constitutions, and the difficulties which have been found to arise in lodges cannot always be solved merely by consulting the book. The booklet *Information for the Guidance of Members of the Craft* is an essential supplement on matters not dealt with in the book, and there are also those elusive concepts known as the Ancient Landmarks, which form the common or unwritten law of Freemasonry.

However, that is no reason for neglecting to attain a competent knowledge of the book, or for relying blindly on the lodge Secretary to see that its rules are complied with, and I hope there is some interest in reviewing the steps by which it arrived at its present state.

First, as to its title. The word 'constitution', when applied to an organization, is commonly regarded to-day as meaning a system of government. In traditional masonic usage it has had a different meaning or meanings. In medieval days what are known as the Ancient Charges or Ancient Constitutions combined a traditional history of the art or craft of Masonry with injunctions as to personal conduct, but say nothing about the organization of the building work. Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1723 and 1738 do say something about the government of speculative Masonry but devote far more space to the history of the operative craft than to the General Regulations of the speculatives, and the historical section, of forty-eight pages in 1723 and 142 in 1738, is directed to be read at the admission of a new brother. This practice was continued in all the editions of the Constitutions published by the premier Grand Lodge.